

MJP Feis Survival Handbook



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SECTION 1: FEIS BASICS

What is a Feis?

Feis, pronounced *fesh*, is the Irish word we Irish dancers use to refer to our competitions. Translated literally, it means festival.

Feiseanna (plural for feis) used to consist of music, story telling, singing and of course, dancing. Although most modern feiseanna consist only of Irish dance competitions, some current feiseanna have music and other competitions held at them.

How do I know when the next feis is?

- 1) The MJP website has all local upcoming competitions listed on our Calendar page
- 2) Feisworx.com has a listing of most upcoming competitions along with schedules and other useful information
- 3) A FULL listing of all feiseanna occurring for the year in north America can be found at: <http://www.northamericanfeiscommission.org/>

How do I register?

For all competitions, your dancer will be registered by your teacher. A list with your dancer's competition numbers and fees owed will be e-mailed out to you with payment details.

All dancers that are competitive are automatically registered for all Calgary competitions (unless you specify otherwise) and dancers are only registered for out of town competitions at the dancer and/or the family's request.

Feis Age explained

This is the question I deal with most with first time feis parents. The reason your child is dancing in the U7 (Under 7) age group even though they are 7 years old right now is because of "Feis age".

Feis age is determined by the dancer's age as of January 1 of the current year. So, if your Birthday is early January, you are in luck and you will have the advantage by dancing with younger dancers every year. If your birthday happens to be late in the year, then you will be with the older dancers.

SECTION 2: DAY OF THE FEIS

What to Expect

If your dancer is competing in figure dances (group dances) or if you are an adult dancer, you will most likely be dancing Friday evening. Friday competitions usually start at 6:00pm.

If you are dancing solos, all of your dances will be on EITHER Saturday or, Sunday. If you are in Beginner to Prizewinner level (in other words, not at championship level) you will most likely be dancing on Sunday although some competitions switch days and do Beginner grades on Saturdays instead. Always double check the feis syllabus online before you make any solid plans or bookings.

Most competitions begin at 8:00 a.m. which means that you need to be there at 7:00 a.m.

Always arrive one hour prior to your competition start. If a feis is running early, they are permitted to run your competition up to an hour early.

Some families choose to stay at the hotel where the competition is being held for the sake of convenience. There are special feis rates for this. You can check the syllabus for this on our e-mail outs before a feis or directly on the Feisworx website. Give yourself extra time for traveling, parking and unloading, especially if a feis is downtown. Make sure you have money for parking, admission, a program (optional) vendors and food.

Upon arrival, check in at the registration table to pick up the **number card** your child will wear for the competition. On the back of the card is a list of all the dances that she/he will be dancing.

You will have a **schedule** either e-mailed out to you or, you can find it online the week before the feis posted on Feisworx or on the feis website. Download and print the program and/or schedule before the feis and highlight your dances so that you can see approximately what time you will be dancing and what stage you are dancing on.

At the feis itself, the stages have a board with each competition number that will be danced on the stage that day posted in order. The current competition is always the first number posted since as each dance is completed, the numbers are crossed off or taken down. Please be sure to stay on top of things as the people running the stage can forget to take down the dance that has just been completed.

Before your dancer's competition starts, have a look at each stage on which your child will be dancing and take note of the area next to the stage where the **dancers line up**. There will be a feis staff member there checking in the dancers for each event. Children should check in for each event as soon as the dancers in the preceding event walk out on stage. Direct your child to the person checking in the dancers. Pay attention to the announcements; they will announce which competition is about to take place and often, when they would like the next set of competitors to check in.

NOTE: Events are grouped by age and skill level. Brand new dancers may dance their solo events one after the other on the same stage, but there is no guarantee this will be the case. (This does not include special events, such as a "First Feis Special," which may take place later in the day on a different stage.)

How the dances are run

Dancers are divided into groups based on skill level, age and sometimes gender. There are six levels of solo competition: Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Novice, Prizewinner, Preliminary and Open. The last two levels (Preliminary and Open) are championship level. The qualifications and dances used for each level are discussed in detail in section 4.

There is one judge sitting at a table in front of each of the stages and the musicians are seated off to one side of the stage or room. The dances are danced in the following order for each group: Reel, Light Jig, Slip Jig, Single Jig, Hard Jig, Hornpipe, and St. Patrick's Day (Traditional Set). Eventually, your child will be doing all of these.

In addition to the above, each feis offers: First Feis Reel, First Feis light jig, First Feis Trophy Reel (for first time dancers at their first feis), Treble Reel Trophy Specials, Slip Jig Trophy Specials for girls and Reel Trophy Special for boys. The only difference between regular competitions and trophy competitions is that dancers have the chance to win trophies in the Trophy specials.

If it is your dancer's first feis, they will most likely be dancing their Reel three times! First time parents and dancers always find this confusing. The reason they do their reel three times is that they will dance it for First Feis Reel, First feis Trophy Reel and then later on, they will dance their Reel at the beginner level against dancers that it may or may not be their first feis. They will dance their Light Jig only twice.

Depending on the number of dancers, they are lined up with 10 dancers per line and brought out onto the stage all at the same time. Dancers will perform two or three at a time depending on the size of the competition and the judge's preference.

Although the dancers will all be performing the same dance (ie: Reel) each school has their own choreography for each dance. So, don't panic if your child is doing different steps than the child next to them. This is totally normal and correct.

Sometimes dancers from the same school can end up competing in the same competition. We discourage the dancers from our school from dancing together onstage for a few reasons.

One: they get to meet new friends if they have to stand next to other dancers and

Two: If both dancers are doing the exact same steps together, it is easier for the judge to see if one of them makes a mistake or is a better dancer than the other.

For beginner and sometimes advanced beginner competitions, there will be a staff member on stage that will count your dancer in and tell them when to step out to prepare.

When a dancer is finished dancing, they bow and then return to the line at the back of the stage until all of the dancers onstage have finished dancing. At this time, the judge (Adjudicator) will signal when she/he is done with the scoring and they will ring a bell or nod their heads to dismiss the line. The dancers will then perform two bows (one to the judge and then one to the musician) before walking off the stage.

Awards/Results

In solo dancing events, each dance is judged and awarded separately.

Results are either announced on the stage the dance was performed or posted on the wall in a separate "results room". Usually, the only results that are announced are Trophy competitions and sometimes the first feis competition results. You will have to wait until lunch time (or until the end of the day if you started after lunch) for these results to be announced even though they were the first competition of the day. This is because the stages need to be on break from dancing for awards to take place properly.

Please note that in order for a dancer to receive an award they have won, they must be in FULL costume, complete with dance shoes to appear onstage. If your dancer misses the announcement of an award they have won, they can pick up their award at the results table (or in the results room). They will need to have their number with them in order to collect their award(s).

Important Tips - Parents

- 1) Cover your dancer's costume with a dress cover or one of Dad's old shirts when your dancer is not dancing. Or, better, have them take it off (but please don't let them walk around in just bloomers) Remember: No eating in costume!!

- 2) If your child is dancing in figures (group dances), do not use your dancer's solo number for the figure dances. Different numbers are used for the figure dances - one number per team per event, worn by only one dancer.
- 3) **Expect Delays!** The amount of time it will take to complete a group of events can only be estimated. Estimates are based on the number of entrants, but it is often the case that schedules must be determined before all the entries are submitted. Often, you may have rushed to be ready for eight o'clock in the morning to wait around for an hour for a late start to a feis. Conversely, sometimes things run a little too well and competitions run ahead of schedule. The complexity of feis planning and the large number of involved parties make delays and waiting around for results common. Due to this, please plan to be at feis for the full day. That way, it helps avoid frustration.
- 4) Water is usually provided for dancers and their families although sometimes the jugs are not refilled frequently. Be sure to bring some back up water just in case. Some feiseanna will allow you to bring small coolers. Bring plenty of snacks and drinks as the vendors can often be expensive and often, there isn't time to run out to get food.
- 5) Children must be supervised at all times. It's a good idea to bring things that will entertain siblings while your child is dancing. In consideration of the dancers and those who are watching, crying babies should be taken out of the ballroom or away from the area where the dancing is taking place.
- 6) ***DO NOT BRING A VIDEO CAMERA. VIDEO TAPING OF THE DANCING OR PHOTOGRAPHY WHILE DANCERS ARE PERFORMING IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED - NO EXCEPTIONS!***
Each school owns the rights to their school's choreography and therefore it is protected. You are may take photos during awards or when your dancer is not onstage.

Important Tips - Dancers

- 1) Be sure to get a good nights sleep two nights before the feis.
- 2) Eat healthy food with lots of energy the night before and the day of. Eg: Pasta
- 3) The day before, do at LEAST one full run of each and every dance you will be performing the next day. Be sure you get at least one GOOD run of each before finishing your practice.
- 4) Be sure to warm up (at least 10-15 minutes) AND stretch before you compete as nerves can make it harder to warm up and can make your muscles stiff which can lead to injury.
- 5) Please do not walk around with just bloomers on or your tummy showing. Although Irish dance is a close knit community and we can be lulled into a sense of security, you never know who may have come into the venue.
- 6) Bring a water bottle and stay hydrated.
- 7) If you can find me, ask me to watch you run through one of your dances. It can help make you feel more confident. But, make sure you have plenty of time to make it to your competition on time!

What is expected of me as a dancer and parent?

As a parent, we ask that you follow the advice below in order to get the best performance out of our dancers.

Please keep in mind that the point of a feis is not to go in there and win first every time. The point is to become a better dancer and better performer. It is not important whether or not you beat another dancer. What is important is that you achieve a better mark than at your last feis.

Parents: It can certainly be tempting to tell your dancer to go and get first place as a pep talk, but please resist. If the competition becomes about something that is beyond your dancer's control, or if they are pressured to achieve something they have no control over (winning first) then your dancer will perform poorly. We cannot control how the other dancers will perform or which dancer the judge will like best. The only thing your dancer can control is how they dance. So, if your dancer focuses on dancing the best they can and stays focused on having fun and completing a strong performance, your dancer will perform better and will have a more positive experience.

Please do not try to coach or teach your child. Doing this can untrain things we have been working with your child to do and can confuse them. As well, coaching your child runs the risk of having your dancer equate how they perform with how you feel about them as a person. This will only serve to put more pressure on the child and cause them to perform poorly. Teaching your child to dance is the teacher's job. We are professionals and will do our very best to ensure your child is ready for the feis.

Lastly, please remember that all of our behaviour at a feis (Parents, Teachers and students) is a reflection on our school. At MJP, we value sportsmanlike behaviour. Please do not speak negatively of any dancers, adjudicators, teachers or other schools. A good thing to remember is that you never know if someone's Mom or teacher is sitting right behind or in front of you. At the same time, please refrain from making negative comments about our own dancers or school when you are at the feis. We are a small community and rumors get started fast. If you have a valid complaint, please bring it to myself or another teacher so that it can become constructive criticism.

Please be a graceful winner and a good loser (try congratulating your competitors).

SECTION 3: THE JUDGING

What they are looking for

A dancer's score at a competition is subjective and is to some extent based on a judge's particular style preferences but, the general things every judge is looking for are the same. And a dancer's mark will be based on the following:

Timing: The dancer's timing with the music and whether or not their hard shoe rhythms are correct.

Carriage: Arms close to their body and straight.

Back straight and not bending forward on jumps and kicks

Shoulders back

Head straight ahead at all times, eyes straight ahead, and chin held level or slightly up.

Steps: Difficulty level of steps. But, please note that this is irrelevant if the dancer executes the steps poorly.

Execution: Feet crossed and knees crossed or close together (depending on the move)

Feet turned out

High up on toes

Knees fully straightened when lifting, jumping, pointing etc.

Back leg lifting fully up to the bum for jumps, lift backs, skip forwards, etc.
Toes fully pointed whenever off the ground
Flexibility

Advancing to the next level in competition

This is probably the most confusing part of Irish dancing. Here is a quick reference guide. A detailed description can be found in the "Feis rules" section below.

Number of dancers required in the competition to move dancer(s) to the next level:

Less than 5: no placing advances

5 - 9 dancers: 1st place moves up

10 - 19 dancers: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place move up

20 - 29 dancers: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th place move up

30 or more dancers: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th place move up

Trophy competitions and Championship:

-A dancer who wins two first place trophies in Beginner/Advanced Beginner Trophy advances to Novice/Prizewinner Trophy

- A dancer who advances to Novice or Prizewinner for the majority of their solo dances automatically advances to the Novice/Prizewinner Trophy.

- A dancer who wins two first place trophies in Novice/Prizewinner Trophy advances to Preliminary Championships.

- A dancer who wins their Preliminary Championships twice, advances to Open Championships.

SECTION 4: PREPARING FOR THE WORST

No one likes to think of the following happening to them but, the truth is, that these things can happen to any competitor. The important thing is to be prepared, keep your head up and if at all possible, remember to KEEP ON DANCING!

Falling

If you do fall onstage, the rule is: Get up and keep dancing! Try and find your place in the music by continuing to say the step in your head even as you push yourself up from the ground. Obviously it takes practice to get good at this but, try your best.

If you do stand up to find yourself completely lost, do one two threes or, make it up until the beginning of the next step. DO NOT just give up and walk away as you will be disqualified. If you get up and dance, you wont be docked any marks.

If you are hurt very badly onstage either from a fall or a slip and cannot dance, then do your best to move out of the way of the other dancer as they are not allowed to stop dancing unless the judge rings the bell.

But, not to worry, usually, if the judge sees that one dancer is badly injured, or if the judge sees a bad fall that ISNT faked, they will ring the bell and stop the competition.

Missing a dance

If you arrive side stage and your competition is already running, do NOT freak out. Calmly talk to the volunteers side-stage and they will most likely put you onstage after the other competitors or, they will send you on up late. Never just head up onstage on your own as you may enter on the wrong side and/or distract the dancers currently onstage.

If you have missed your dance entirely, try to shrug it off and dance the rest of your dances to the best of your ability. Remember, the people working the feis are volunteers and are not there to be treated badly. Also, there will always be another feis where you can make sure you are on time.

Falling items

The most embarrassing occurrence of this is probably losing a wig onstage. Other things that can come lose are: Tiaras, shoelaces, shoes, shawls, hairpins and, sometimes even a heel or a tip off of your hardshoe!

Obviously, some of these things are preventable and dancers should be very picky about double checking how securely everything is tied up and pinned on before they head for the sage. Other things (such as a broken shoe or a projectile hairpin) are things that no one can predict.

In any case, your best bet is to try to forget about the object and keep dancing without tripping over it. If the object is dangling or obstructing your view, try to grab it with one quick motion and hold it by your side until you finish dancing.

If your shoe breaks in such a way that you cannot dance, there really is nothing you can do except hobble through your dance and hope that the judge notices and rings the bell. But, be very careful you do not injure yourself in the process.

Making a mistake in your steps

It happens to everyone: You are totally prepared, your hair is perfect, you're smiling, you've just counted yourself in and you lift your leg to start the first perfect move and realize that your brain is empty!

The best way to beat this is to mentally rehearse each dance before going up onstage and then, while you are waiting in line counting yourself in, go through the first few movements of your step in your head so that you are ready when the time comes.

But, if you do blank out at any time onstage, the best thing to do is to keep going. Keep smiling and keep making up steps until the next set of eight starts. It is very rare that a judge will let you re-dance if you forget your steps unless you are either very young, or in beginner.

If you start doing the wrong dance

This usually only happens in the beginning stages so, usually if it happens and the dancer notices that they are doing the wrong dance, the judge will often ring the bell. The other option is to try to switch to the correct dance as soon as possible or, you can try to make the dance fit as best you can to that tune. The second option works very well for light jig and single jig but, not so well for slip jig or reel. 😊

Bumps and bruises

Since everyone onstage are from different schools and doing different choreographies, the chances of bumping into another dancer are quite high.

So, always try to be aware of where the other dancer is and do your best to avoid them. If you do bump, kick or get kicked by the other dancer, continue on dancing the best you can. If the other dancer falls, KEEP DANCING until the judge rings the bell or you will be disqualified. Unless you can really hear that the other dancer is in serious pain. In that case, you should probably stop dancing.

Judges will take off points for aggressive behavior or for purposely refusing to move out of the way to avoid a bump when the other dancer can't see you. So, please, always be aware when onstage and use good stage manors.

SECTION 5: FEIS CHECKLIST

- Dress (solo and or school dress)
- or skirt and blouse (make sure both are clean)
- Bloomers
- Headband/ Tiara/Hair scrunchie
- Poodle socks/ Tights
- Sock glue or Glue stick
- Both pairs of shoes: Ghillies (soft shoes) and Heavy shoes
- Spare shoe laces or elastics
- Shoe shine and or Black marker
- Black duct tape (for bottom of hard shoes if the stage is slippery)
- Wig
- A Bag For Your Curlers or a Wig box
- A Hairnet
- Make-up (if you're old enough)
- Competitor number holder
- Yarn / String or Ribbon for number
- Extra rhinestones
- First aid kit
- A pen and highlighter to mark the dances you are in
- Safety pins
- Bobby Pins
- Hair Spray
- Water Bottle
- Snacks
- Something to do in between dances
- Practice shorts or pants for warm-up

SECTION 6: FEIS RULES*:

*Compiled from North America Feis Commission (NAFC). For a complete listing of rules, please go to www.northamericanfeiscommission.org

1. In the case of all solo and team competitions in all grades, the age of a competitor on 1st January of the year in which the competition is held will determine the right of entry. For the purposes of this Rule a competitor whose birthday occurs on 1st January shall be deemed to be under the age attained on that date.

3. A competitor may be disqualified for any of the following reasons:

- a) Conduct unbecoming a lady or gentleman.
- b) Failure to report on time to compete. (Penalty: disqualification from said event)
- c) Falsification of age or other important facts – i.e., teaching, award winning, competing under another competitor's name or number, etc.

Penalty for a) or c): Competitor will be disqualified from the Feis at which the occurrence happened and from all NAFC – registered Feiseanna for a period of one year beginning at the date of the occurrence.

5. Solo competitors in First Feis (if offered), Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Novice or Open (Prizewinner) competitions:

- a) Must compete in their own age group.
- b) Must be prepared to perform two steps in each event.
- c) Cannot change competition on the day of the Feis.

6. Steel taps or “bubble” heels on dancing shoes, display of awards, wearing of shorts or other unconventional dress is prohibited. Authentic Gaelic dress is desired. First Feis (if offered), Beginner and Advanced Beginner, aka Beginner I and II, must wear a class costume, or a skirt and blouse. All other categories are excluded from this rule. Modest attire is encouraged when a competitor is not dancing.

7. Competitor’s number must be worn and visible to adjudicators when performing in all competitions, except in Championships; use of plastic number covers is discouraged.

9. Complaints must be in writing stating names and other factual information and signed by the complainant. A ten-dollar fee must be enclosed and presented to the Feis Chairman within one hour of the occurrence. The fee will be returned if the complaint is upheld.

18. The status of the dancer does not change unless there are five or more dancers in a competition.

19. A Feis Committee may combine two consecutive age categories into the higher of the two categories within that grade when less than five (5) competitors are entered.

Beginner Grade: A beginner is a competitor who has not yet taken a full year of Irish Dance lessons, thereby giving beginners a full year with such status. A Beginner must move into the Advanced Beginner category the next year.

Advanced Beginner Grade: An advanced beginner who wins 1st, 2nd or 3rd place will advance to the Novice category in that particular dance. Competition dances are reel, light jig, slip jig, traditional treble jig and traditional hornpipe, as a minimum requirement.

Novice Grade: A novice who wins a 1st place will advance to the Open (Prizewinner) category in that particular dance.

Open Grade (Prizewinner): A competitor who does not qualify as a beginner, advanced beginner or as a novice.

Adult Beginner: An adult beginner is a competitor who never took Irish dancing lessons as a juvenile and is over 18 years of age.

15. Preliminary Championships are open to those who, at any NAFC recognized Feis:

- a) Have won 1st place in both an open/prizewinner light and heavy shoe competition, and

- b) Have never won 1st, 2nd or 3rd in Open Championship. A dancer who wins two first place awards in one calendar year will move on to Open Championship the following year, or as soon as the second win is achieved, in any age category, in the following years. Only in the case of back-to-back Feiseanna (successive days), in which case the first win in the first Feis will not change the dancer’s status for the second Feis. A dancer is required to perform a light shoe dance (reel or slip jig for ladies and reel only for men), and a hard shoe dance. A Feis can opt to offer either a) a set dance or b) a jig/hornpipe.

13. a) Dancers must qualify for open championship via the method now in place for preliminary championship, i.e. two 1st place wins.

17. First place winners in the Open Championship category cannot return to a Preliminary or Open (Prizewinner) competition. Placing in a Regional or National Oireachtas does not change the status of a competitor. If, after dancing for two years in Open, a dancer has not won, he/she may return to preliminary championship status.

20. Musicians and adjudicators cannot be approached during a competition by anyone except the Feis Committee. No one can approach them while a competitor is performing.

25. First Feis (if offered), Beginner, Advanced Beginner and Adult dancers are required to dance at traditional speeds. Novice and Open/Prizewinner dancers may choose between traditional and Oireachtas speeds.

26. Any form of unauthorized photography which has the capability to capture a dancer's image while in motion, using electronic or manual means, i.e. mobile phone, standard camera, video camera, or commercial film, with or without enhancement is expressively forbidden in competition.

27. No block, en Pointe, toe walking movements, stationary or moving is allowed to be performed for all ages up to and including the under 12 age group. However, after September 1 of each year an exception is made for those dancers who are 11 dancing in the under 12 age group.

28. Make up is prohibited on a dancer in the first three grades up to and including the under 12 age group.

29. Any competitor found to be using artificial carriage aids and subsequently refuses to remove same, will be subject to disqualification from that particular competition. Medically prescribed aids (proof of which may be required) will be exempt from this rule.

SECTION 7: USEFUL CONTACTS

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact us at:

- MJP Feis Co-ordinator e-mail: mjpfais@hotmail.com (If you have questions about any of the above information)
- MJPIDA Costume co-ordinator e-mail: mjpdress@hotmail.com
- MJPIDA email (For used shoe exchange): mjpida@hotmail.com
- Steele Celtic Dancewear (For all your dance wear needs): <http://www.irishdanceshoes.com/>
- 576 Coach Grove Rd SW Calgary, AB (403) 686-3514
- Feis information and upcoming dates: <http://www.feisworx.com>
- Complete listing of all competitions in north America:
<http://www.northamericanfeiscommission.org/>

